



Cyclones in High Northern Latitudes

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Argotist Ebooks

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Argotist Ebooks

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For Deborah Stretton

1965 - 2009

Cyclones in High Northern Latitudes

Her dignity
could not be effaced
by the quality
of her clothes.

I knew this
back near the border
when I was not satisfied.

I recommend highly
a new approach
to the situation.

Such was the time
spent together.

What could I offer her
that would not
betray her?

Money was cold comfort,
bleak as the weather.

There would be
half a smile
and polite rejection
and words
beneath her breath
in a language
not spoken since
a time
before words
were written.

All this
I tell you now.
A time
there was
when such
could not be broached.

Not even
by those
whose position
it was to assist.

Why do I
go on this way?

These memories
forbid
true contemplation.
If only
the sight of her

had been enough.

If only
the mention
of her now
was enough
to assuage
the inevitable
distance.

These things arrive
in old cases
full of letters,
photographs
vanished with age.

She emerges
as a shape
on their surfaces
and I remember,
but I do not recall
how it began.

That would be conjecture.

Still,
the images return.

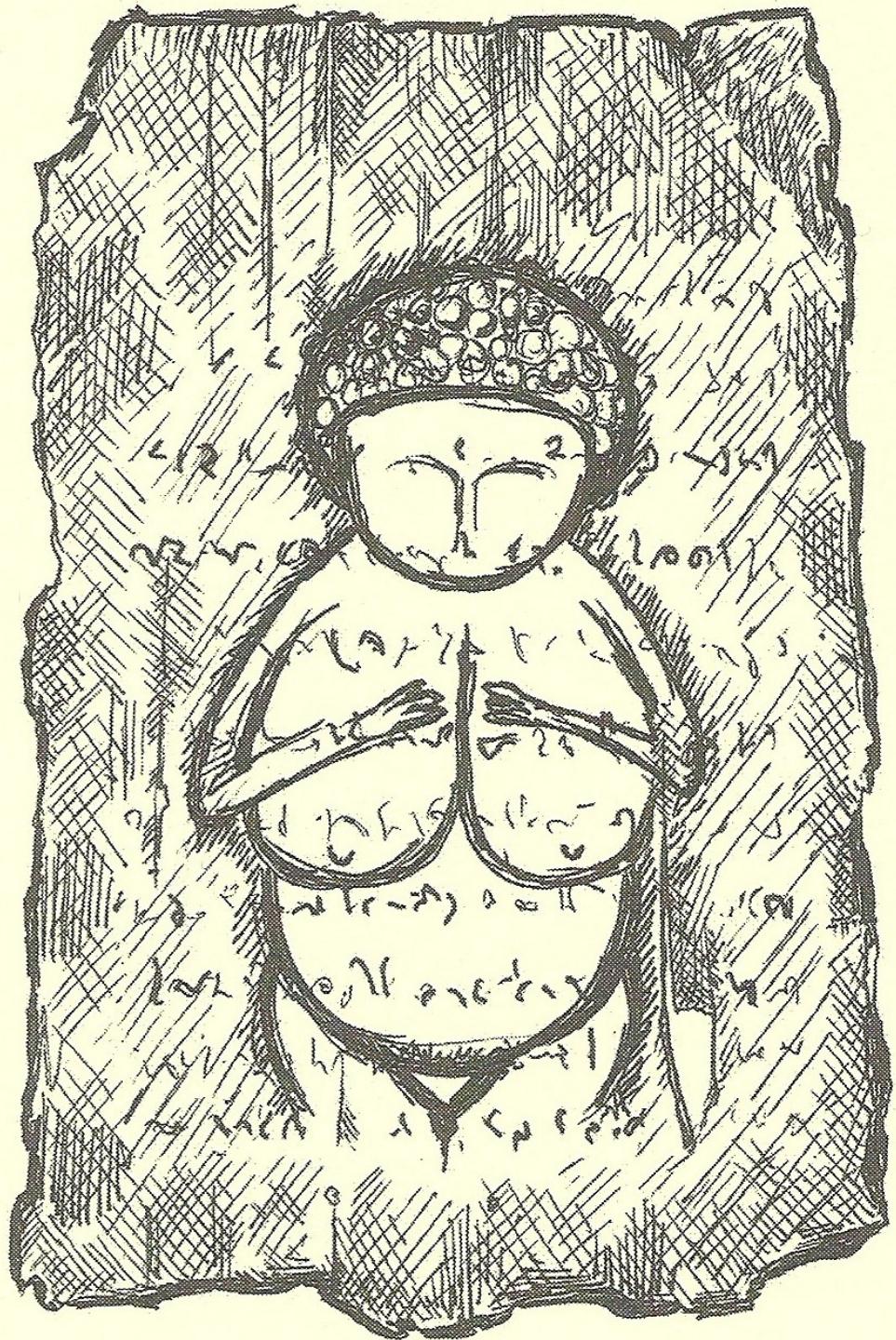
As I went out this morning
I had misgivings
about Netscape.

Not the ordinary kind
that many surfers
must have
from time to time.

(Such fears
are seldom
realized and
as such
should be
summarily discounted.)

No, my fears
were more base.

If it were
in my power,
I would relate
them to you
but given
that time has
made them



unspeakable,
I have to demur
from doing so.
At first
we suspected
the machinery,
complications
in the algorithms,
a feedback loop
intense enough
to penetrate
the human skull,
but that was all folklore.
It remains
in the air,
it appears
on television programs
designed to appeal to
the superstitious.
Beyond that
it has no value at all.

I fear that something
more sinister
is at work,
if I could only wipe
the pixels
from my eyes.
But instead
I keep hearing
talk about renovation,
which appears
almost as a
remembrance
to the visiting many.
Yet, I told them before,
in three differing disguises,
that I will not
enter the gardens,
nor alarm
the inmates of the house.
And I promise
never to deprive
the ladies
of their senses

or become a burden
to their families.

I know of such things
from a past time,
and the trouble it can cause.

But today
my extension
has been granted
and I can proceed
on my course.

The maps and blueprints
are laid on a table before me,
the maid bows
and politely
backs out of the room.

At first glance
they seem completely indecipherable,
an inscrutable tract left by aliens.

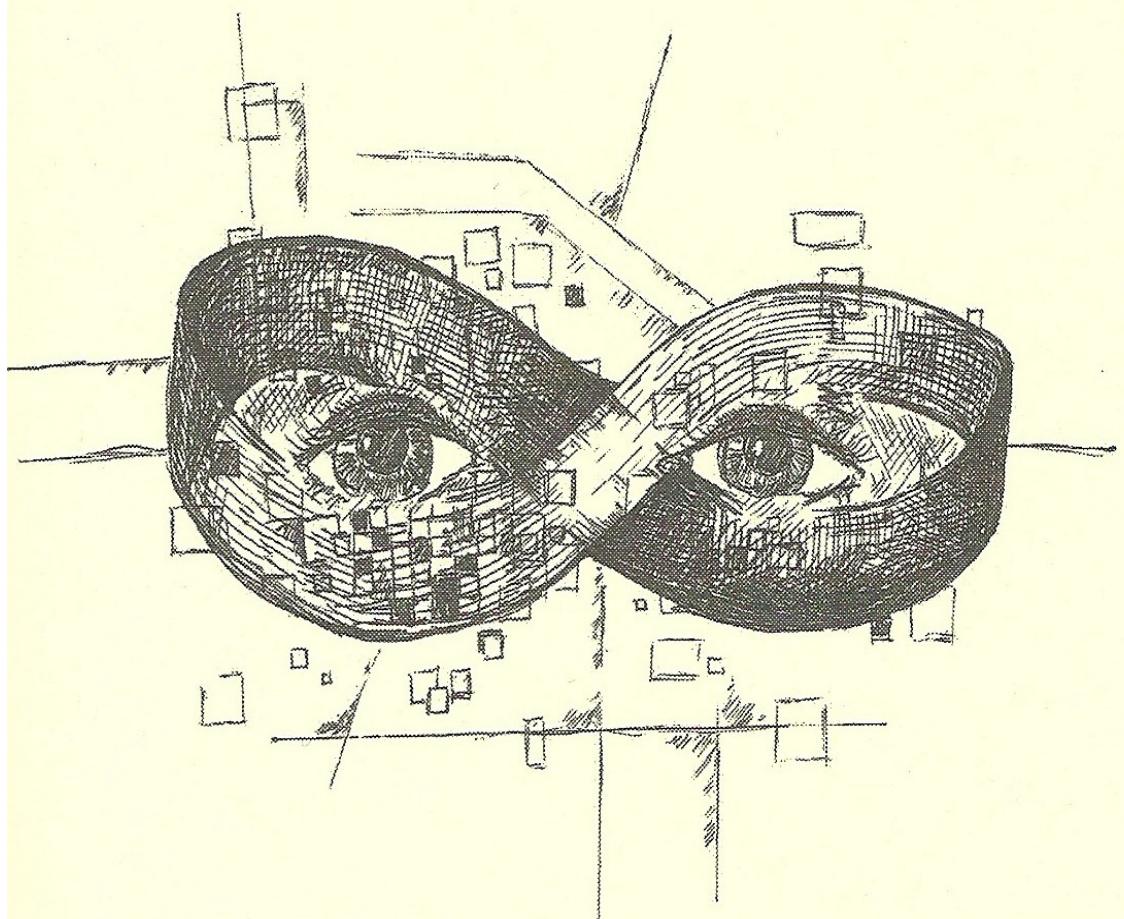
I have difficulty believing
that I,

in another time and form,
created them myself.

Gradually, with study,
the language
and specialized terminology
return to me
and I become
comfortable enough
to begin to make
the necessary changes
to allow for the demands
of my patrons.

The greatest difficulty
may be with the terraces
or the third,
secret hand,
of the gardeners
that tend them.

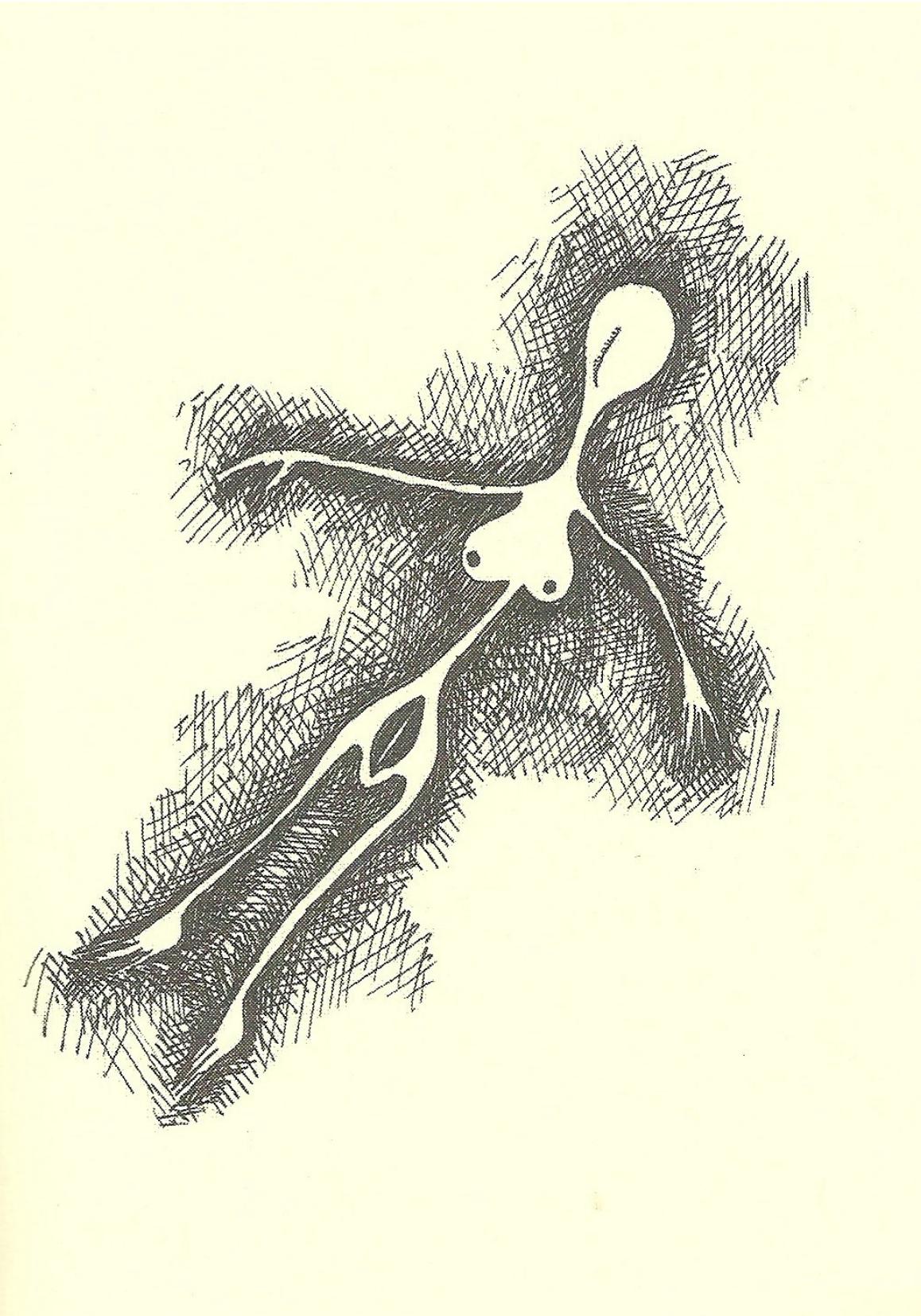
I have heard
that these gardeners
have relinquished
any notion
of scientific impartiality,
hence the



dubious nature
of their findings.
Me, I tried
to enter into things
but my maps
were discarded,
and the institute
carefully audited
my outgoings.
Now I am
the subject
of councils
who have denied me
my meanderings
within the hallways
of pedantry.
How I long
for the days of
the river,
where I could rest easy
on my boat
and cook kippers
before the tornadoes.
I had a wife then,
and a son on the way.
But to dwell on the past
just serves to bring
the present into grief,
and I can see
the clouds forming now
and a storm brewing.
Was freedom as tangible then
as I remember it being,
now that
it is so elusive?
Now, when fear
is the only
common coin,
the storms
seem more ominous.

When I study the clouds
I find things written there
I am unable to comprehend.
When I met her,

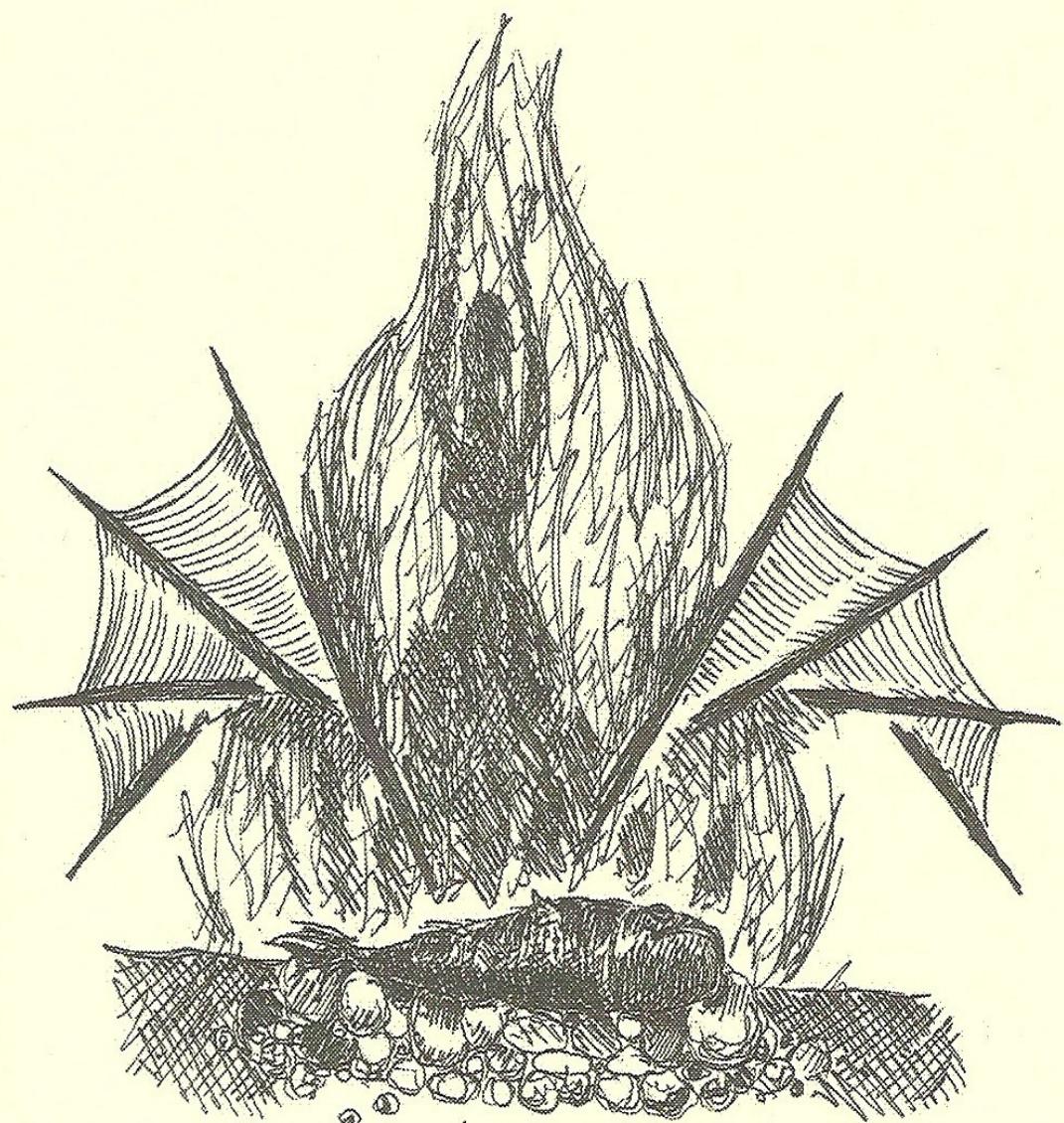
those first months,
we had
complete command
of the skies.
Not a drop fell
that did not
on some level,
catch our attention.
The whole earth
was ripe
with meaning
and we needed
no intermediary.
Now I hustle
though my days
to stay ahead
of the guards,
the dogs of cognizance
who know nothing at all
except greed
and revenge
and subservience
to masters that
none of us have seen
or believe to exist.
Today, though,
I've got my eye
on some land,
but I'm scared in case
I'm too far gone
to turn around.
When you're on the run
perspective gets lost,
and you tend to
go with resistance.
She knew that too;
at least she said she did.
If only the sound of her voice
could be with me now.
But sound here
is a much
desired thing.
I cannot make it
and I cannot
hear it,



lest I be discovered
in my hiding place.
When you're on the run
you have to make
these sacrifices.
She knew that too.
From my vantage point
on this promontory,
I can see all around.
Sometimes I look up;
sometimes I look down.
Things don't
look too good.
That may be
well understood
from my condition.
I am fading
like a falling leaf.

Events rush
toward me
in waves.
I am unable
to discern
if this is purely
subjective
or if reality,
nature,
the world
as we observe it
is actually rising
and receding
in regular intervals.
I pace my room—
a circular stone cloister
built into a
high cliff face
on the edge
of the sea.
I suspect monks,
perhaps of some heretic order,
carved their dwelling here
to live in peace
with only the sound
of the waves,

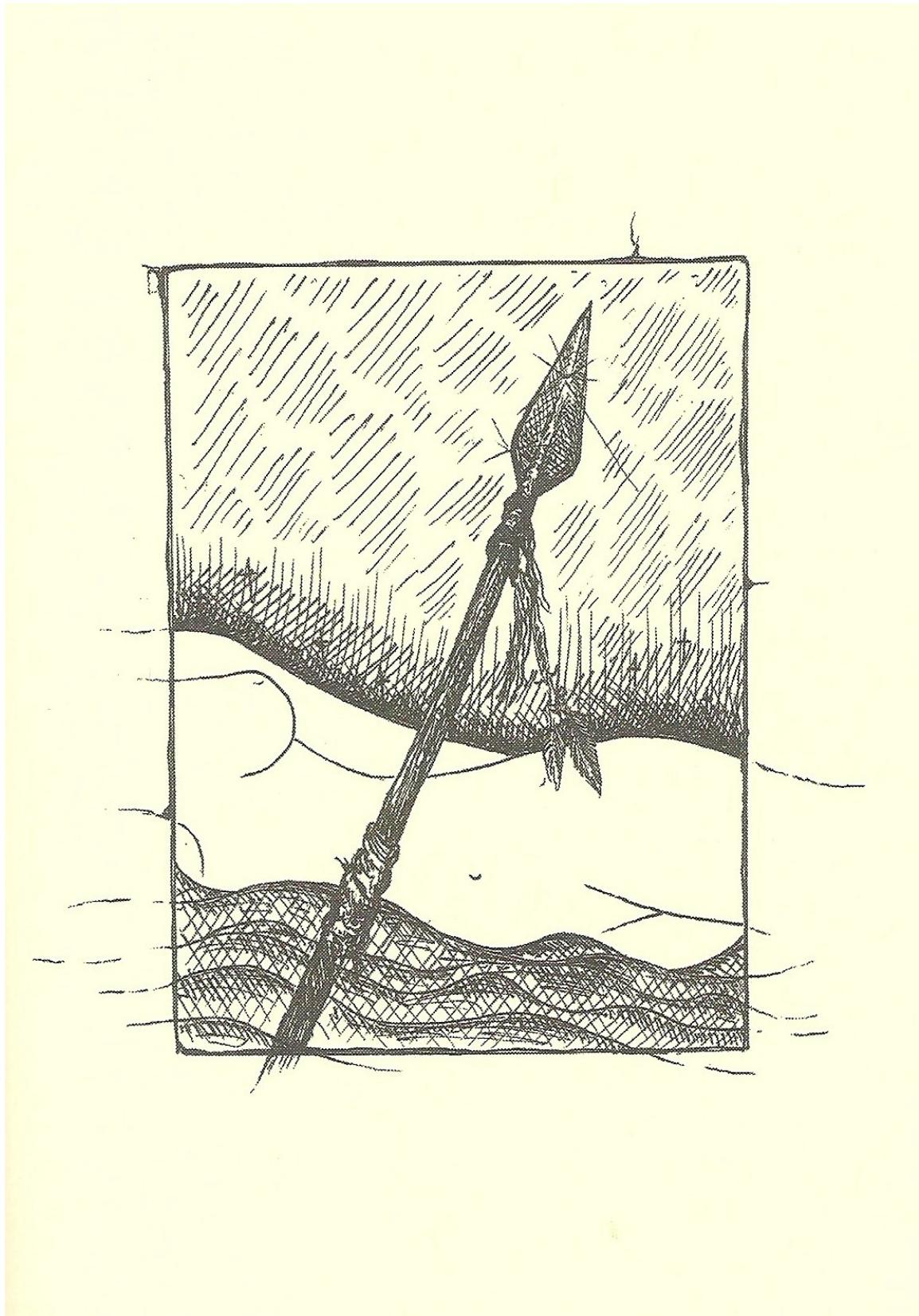
their prayers and chants
to keep them alive
and free of their oppressors.
Just now
she stepped
in from outside
and told me
the fish we caught this morning
were cooked
and ready to eat.
I didn't bother to answer
or even turn away
from the window.
I learned long ago
to distinguish between
strong memories and
whatever the world is,
rushing in now again
with a large bird
on the horizon,
or is that some sort
of flying machine?
I was always
like a kingfisher
to her especially
after a day's labour
tilling the soil
on land
I would never own.
The daily struggles
almost made me refuse
the fish brought to me
but for her kind smile
and simple measures
that helped to defuse
my incipient anger.
But even now,
centuries later,
I am forbidden
certain things
that any other man
can easily claim.
But we're still here
after all these years,
and I'm still trying



to work out
what went wrong.
I hated my life
because of a beautiful woman,
and because of this
I ended up in insurance.
It seems like
all the women I love
are with inappropriate men.

Do they seem
inappropriate to me
because I wish
to possess them
and cannot,
or because
of some desire
they have
to live in situations
in which they are destined
to be dissatisfied?
I pour over the figures
in the actuary tables.
I am obsessed with them.
They hold the traces,
the movement
of the beast
inside the herd,
expose its true motives.
No beast
that ever drug a plow
through hard ground
could match the strength
or malevolence
that dwells
in the meticulous methods
of those numbers.
That beast
is still in the wild,
unknown,
unnamed,
and unaccountable
to any law,
even its own proclivities.
Just at the moment

you think you have
discovered its physics
it explodes into
wild distortions—
earthquakes
where no fault line
was previously known,
cyclones
in high northern latitudes.
Still, I must pursue
something,
if only to distract me
from her memory.
Sometimes
in my dreams,
she merges
with the beast
in the statistics.
When I wake,
for a moment,
I wonder
if they
are one and the same.
And now I know
they are,
for I remember her
in front of the
turquoise door
in Dublin Street.
We both played
our best hand then,
but I lost;
or did I really win?
She bound me
so fast
that I half expected
to go mad.
It is fortunate
that I am still
coherent
given the shame
that I befell
when riding
that wicked horse.
But you are always



in my thoughts,
no matter
what part
of the world
you are in.

And I have suffered
for your love,
even though
I knew a great deal
about law.

But woman,
be still now,
for you are watched
by my father
and all his servants,
and I cannot
be responsible
for his actions.

One day you will
experience my love,
as if captured
in my bower.

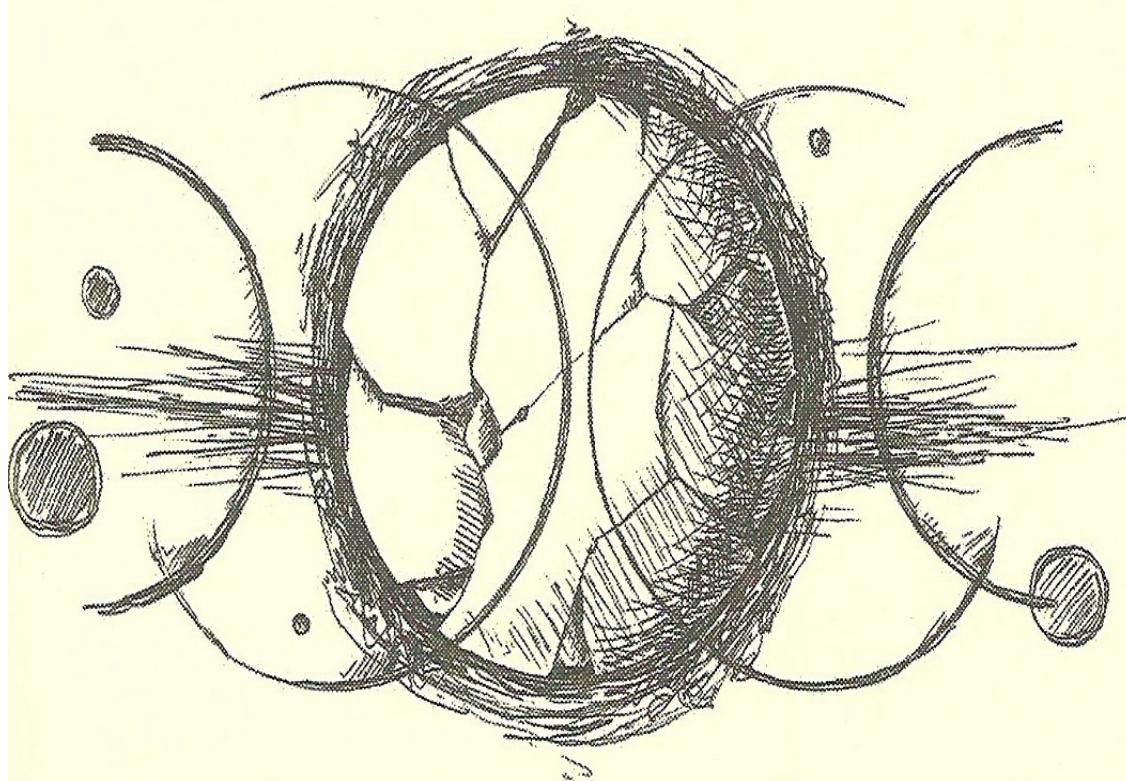
So I wait
for the opportune moment.

I devise plans
for your rescue,
your recovery
and rediscovery
with such meticulous detail
that none of my kin
would be able
to decipher it
in the unlikely event
they stumble
upon its cloister.

But there was something
I had not anticipated,
more virulent
and sinister
than any evil before.
Over the hills
they came in hordes,
led by two men on horseback
with a cross emblazoned

on their chests.
Each of the swarm
carried a knife,
sickle,
pruning hook,
any sharp implement
they had at hand.
It was obvious
that they intended
to kill
every living creature
in their path.
If it had not been
for the small cellar
I'd dug beneath the floor
of my shack
I would have been
another among
the numberless
thousands
they sent to ground.
Nor would I
have been able to
learn the reason
for the scourge
or visit the aftermath
searching,
hoping
against deepest dread
that I would find her.

That I would find her
and save her
from these men
in case her love
became transferred
to them
like that time in Reno.
Me standing helpless
amongst the hordes;
my sorrow and care
just words
she might
cast away.
But such men



can be
beyond reason,
and whilst
the owl slept
I left that place
never to revisit.
I later heard
of her demise
while underground
near Sun Valley.
For many years,
the authorities
held me
as the culprit,
and my hiding continued.
Yet, occasionally
my mind
goes back to when
I was carefree;
when we kissed
fifty times
before the window
where
she stood.

Each of those kisses
opened a world
and each of those worlds
contained their own histories.
Geological ages
come and go,
species ascend
and decline.
For these several years
I had forgotten anything
beyond the
passion
of those kisses.
Their fire
entranced me
and I was
bound
to a single
place and time.
I could not

forget.

Such is the dilemma
of the broken hearted.

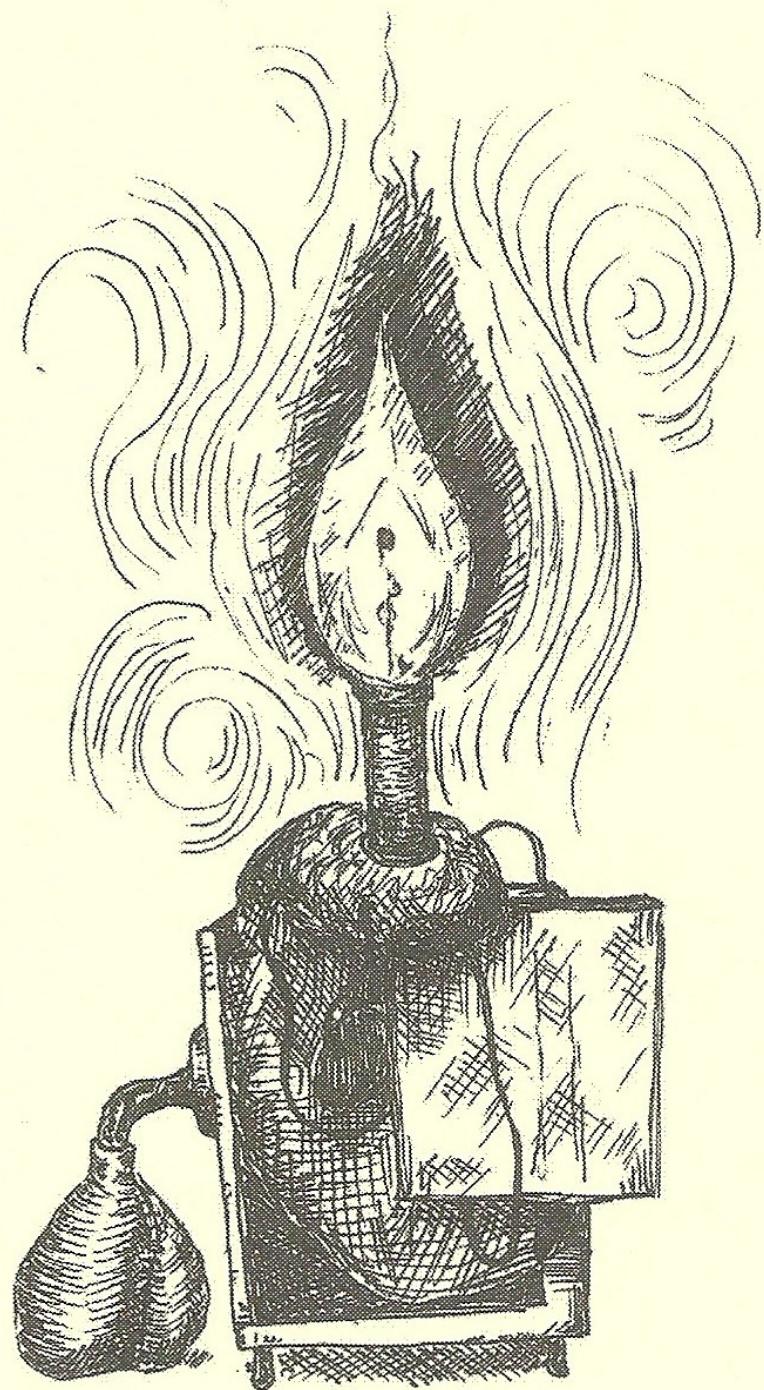
Slowly however,
as I became
more secure
in my hiding place
and began
to become familiar
to the people
in that town
under another name,
wearing a new face,
those worlds
begin to reappear
in my dreams.

Then,
even in daylight,
I would get glimpses.

It was as if
the scene that lay
before me
slid away
like a veil
and behind it,
if only for an instant,
I glimpsed
the 50 worlds
passing
through one another.

A moment of chaos
and confusion,
then clarity,
then the familiar
day to day
world returned.

For now I remain
disconsolate
because I cannot
remember
how to enter
those worlds,
or even
if it is possible
to do so.



Is she
lost forever
to me?
Were those worlds
really mine?
For a time,
there was talk
of rehabilitation,
and the need
for observation.
But my instincts
drove me
far away
from that sort of safety.
Now there's something
about broken bridges
and time.
I couldn't tell her
anything
that I had not
told the rest.
Sometimes
for a fleeting second
I see her dress again
or the shadow
from her body
stretched out
across the bed.
Such images
have sustained me
as I work out
my extra time—
free from the outside
but trapped within.
I'm just walking
through reservations
to recapture land
I once saw.
Don't know
if it's still there,
but I've learned much in trying.

It's another day
in another place.
I'm uncertain where.

I look out the window.

The Bowery again.

How did I get here?

There was the taxi

in Istanbul.

I remember that clearly

because

beneath a flap on the back

of the front seat

was a picture

of you,

scantily clad,

apparently

from a silent porno,

1920s.

That must be

what sent me here,

waking

in this horrible

hotel room,

staring out windows

that have not

been cleaned

in half a century.

Who knows

what lives

in that dust?

I cough into my hand.

Something wet.

I look down.

Blood.

Is this

the start

of something

new?

Tuberculosis

or just

the old stigmata

returned

to get the last laugh?

Either way

time drifts on.

My lust for you

raises more than questions.

But to
question
in this climate
would be a mistake.

I don't know
if I'm still being
followed.

The warnings I received
indicate that I am.

But then again
your contacts
were never
that secure,
and I was
intercepted
when I tried
to cross the border.

You knew
I was never
a security risk
yet you exposed
my cover
and left me here
to bargain
for my freedom.

This blood
I look at
on my hand
now remains
for you.

Concordances
could not
even make me sway;
neither could vistas
and timbrels and
the various options
yet open to me.

This blood
on my hand
speaks clearly
for us now.

We have
nothing left
to barter or to sell.
From my position

at the window
I can see clearly
down both ends
of the narrow
clay street.
Wide enough
for foot traffic only,
or small carts
drawn by beleaguered
donkeys or goats.
In the mornings
the sellers
make their rounds,
wailing
in the thin cool air
the names
of the fruits and vegetables
that are native
to this soil
or the few
ornaments and devices
the poor artisans
cobble together
from scraps of
metal,
glass,
fabric and leather.

Just yesterday
I bought an oil lamp,
then spent
the remainder
of the morning
finding fuel for it.
Last night
when the cold dark settled in
I lit it
and immediately
saw your shadow
move across the floor,
up the wall,
and dance
in the rafters
until I passed out
drinking the

thick green liquor
the locals consume.
I have no idea
from what
it is concocted,
but it produces
a dreamless sleep
and no residual
effect beyond a
constant longing
for love lost?
But that's just me
isn't it?
If I could
only remember
who that was
or when
the memory of him
slipped away.
But all I can recall
is something about
my being employed
as a data input clerk
for an insurance firm
in Lafayette Street.
Certainly not enough
to keep me going
at the time.
And even though
these images
are morphing
into insignificance,
I still contemplate
transactions
beyond legal boundaries
seemingly justified
for the
the sake of eternity.

About the Authors

Jeffrey Side edits The Argotist Online, and has had poetry published in *Poetry Salzburg Review*, *Underground Window*, *A Little Poetry*, *Poethia*, *Nthposition*, *Eratio*, *Pirene's Fountain*, *Fieralingue*, *Moria*, *Ancient Heart*, *Blazevox*, *Lily*, *Big Bridge*, *Jacket*, *Textimagepoem*, *Apochryphaltext*, *9th St. Laboratories*, *P. F. S. Post*, *Great Works*, *Hutt*, *The Dande Review*, *Poetry Bay* and *Dusie*. His book publications include, *Carrier of the Seed*, *Slimvol*, *Cyclones in High Northern Latitudes* (with Jake Berry) and *Outside Voices: An Email Correspondence* (with Jake Berry).

Jake Berry is a poet, musician and visual artist. The author of *Brambu Drezi*, *Species of Abandoned Light*, *Drafts of the Sorcery*, *Genesis Suicide* and numerous other books. He has been an active member of the global arts and literary community for more than 30 years. His poems, fiction, essays, reviews and other writings have been published widely in both print and electronic mediums. In 2010, Lavender Ink released a collaborative book, *Cyclones in High Northern Latitudes*, with poet Jeffrey Side and drawings by Rich Curtis; and *Outside Voices: An Email Correspondence* (with Jeffrey Side) was released by Otoliths also in that year. He regularly records and performs his compositions solo and with the groups Bare Knuckles, The Ascension Brothers and The Strindbergs. *Mystery Songs*, his tenth solo album, was released in 2016. Ongoing projects include books four and five of *Brambu Drezi*, a collection of short poems, and a wide range of musical projects.